

## Cranberry Harvest Down

By MORAG MACLACHLAN

Move over strawberries and blueberries...it's cranberry season.

Dry pickers are finishing up their harvest, while other growers continue to flood their bogs. Soon, residents will be able to purchase berries on the side of the road.

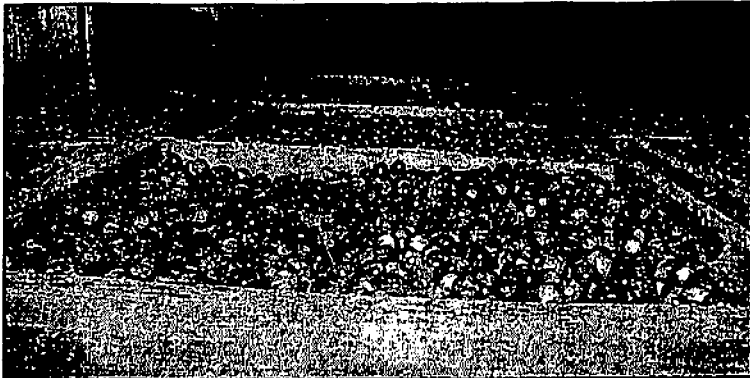
However, this year's crop is down from early predictions. Jeffrey LaFleur, the executive director of the Cape Cod Cranberry Growers' Association, said the USDA estimated 1.7 million barrels of cranberries would be harvested this year in Massachusetts. LaFleur said actual numbers lean more toward about 1.5 million barrels. That's down from last year's harvest of 1.8 million barrels.

"It's a good quality fruit, but the size is not there," LaFleur said.

Local dry picker, Earle Ricker of Mayflower Street, said his crop was down from last year.



Stan Merry, 90, of Merryland Cranberries has been harvesting berries for 40 years.



Merry also dry picks Stevens. These berries are stored in a warehouse to color.

"We're down about 20 to 25 percent," Ricker, a third generation grower, said. "It's partly due to the weather."

LaFleur said mother nature played a role in the diminished crop. The cool, damp spring may have negatively impacted pollination. LaFleur said the hot summer with 55 days of no rain also affected the harvest.

Ricker said the muggy picking season was uncomfortable. Although the berries were small, Ricker said the quality of this fresh fruit is good. He is already done picking his crop because dry pickers gather their berries and then put them into storage to color. Ricker said wet harvest bogs color before the berries are picked.

"Berry development is about a week late this year," Ricker said. "The early berries were off. The late berries, the Howe variety, were pretty good, but they didn't make up for it."

Over on Temple Street, Stan Merry of Merryland Cranberries, surveyed his crew flooding the bogs. Merry, 90, has been in the cranberry business for 40 years. Unlike Ricker, Merry anticipates pick-

ing double last year's numbers. That's because he didn't harvest as much last year due to an oversupply in the market.

"You couldn't make a living from cranberries," Merry said. "The price dropped from \$100 a barrel to \$10 to \$12 a barrel."

Merry's crew of four men dry picks a type of cranberry called Stevens. That supply has been picked and will soon be available for purchase beside the bog on the corner of Temple and Church streets.

"We sell about 10 percent bogside," Merry said.

Merry also supplies Ocean Spray with berries. His wet harvest of Early Blacks and Howes are still being harvested.

LaFleur said about 25 percent of the country's cranberry crop comes from Massachusetts. Duxbury is home to about 379 acres of cranberry bogs. LaFleur said that number has increased since 1996 when 339 acres of land in Duxbury were used for cranberry growing. He said growers usually finish harvesting their bogs by early November.